

Updated March 16, 2020

Department of Education Support for School Safety Initiatives

Congressional interest in K-12 public school safety and security has been strong following recent school shootings, including the mass shootings at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, FL, and Santa Fe High School in Santa Fe, TX. Though public school safety and security is primarily a state and local responsibility, there are several federal programs and initiatives that can support these efforts. This In Focus provides an overview of programs and resources administered by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) for improving school safety.

Currently Funded Grant Programs

ED currently administers two programs that can help state and local educational agencies (SEAs and LEAs) address school safety concerns. Both programs are authorized under Title IV of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA; P.L. 114-95).

Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants

(SSAE grants, commonly referred to as the “block grant” program) are authorized under ESEA Title IV-A. The purpose of SSAE grants is to improve students’ academic achievement by increasing the capacity of states, LEAs, and schools to provide all students with access to a well-rounded education, improve school conditions for student learning, and improve the use of technology. SSAE grant funds are allocated by formula to each SEA, which must allocate the majority of the SSAE block grant funds they receive to LEAs (though they may reserve some funds for state activities to support LEAs receiving grants). Funds are then suballocated via formula to LEAs. Program appropriations were \$1.21 billion in FY2020.

LEAs have substantial flexibility with respect to the use of funds under the SSAE grant program. However, they must use funds for three broad categories of activities: (1) supporting well-rounded educational opportunities, (2) supporting safe and healthy students (including school safety initiatives), and (3) supporting the effective use of technology to improve the digital literacy of all students.

If an LEA receives a grant of \$30,000 or more, it must provide assurances that it will use funds toward activities in each of the three categories, including at least 20% for activities supporting safe and healthy students. If an LEA receives a grant of less than \$30,000, it may choose to use its funds entirely toward one of the categories of activities. In such cases, LEAs may choose to use the entirety of their SSAE grants toward school safety initiatives, or conversely, to use all of their funds for activities under one of the other two categories. Under either scenario, an LEA may choose to support a “safe and healthy student” initiative unrelated

to school safety (e.g., a health or nutrition education program) or an initiative focused on school safety.

The programs and activities an LEA selects to support in the category of Safe and Healthy Students (§4108) must, among other requirements, be used to develop, implement, and evaluate comprehensive programs and activities that are coordinated with other schools and community-based services and programs; and foster safe, healthy, supportive, and drug-free environments that support student academic achievement. Examples of allowable activities in this category related to school safety include the following:

- drug and violence prevention programs and activities that are evidence based (to the extent that such evidence is reasonably available),
- school-based mental health services,
- bullying and harassment prevention programs and activities,
- re-entry/transition programs for justice-involved youth,
- mentoring and school counseling,
- school-wide positive behavioral intervention and support (PBIS) programs, and
- training for school personnel in trauma-informed practices in classroom management and crisis management.

While drug and violence prevention activities are only examples of what an LEA might choose to support with Title IV-A funds, the Title IV-A program includes a definition of what constitutes *drug and violence prevention* in §4102(5). With respect to violence prevention, the term is defined as:

the promotion of school safety, such that students and school personnel are free from violent and disruptive acts, including sexual harassment and abuse, and victimization associated with prejudice and intolerance, on school premises, going to and from school, and at school-sponsored activities, through the creation and maintenance of a school environment that is free of weapons and fosters individual responsibility and respect for the rights of others.

National Activities for School Safety are authorized under Title IV-F-3, Section 4631 of the ESEA. The National Activities for School Safety program authorizes the Secretary of Education (hereinafter referred to as the Secretary) to use a portion of its funds for the Project School Emergency Response to Violence (Project SERV) program. Any remaining funds may be used to carry out

other activities to improve students' safety and well-being, during and after the school day, through grants, contracts, or cooperative agreements with public and private organizations or individuals, or through agreements with other federal agencies. Currently funded National Activities for School Safety include the following:

- **Project SERV:** This program was created to provide resources to LEAs and institutions of higher education (IHEs) that have experienced a violent or traumatic crisis, disrupting the learning environment, such as a school shooting or hurricane. Two types of grants are awarded: (1) Immediate Services grants, which provide short-term support following a traumatic event; and (2) Extended Services grants, which address long-term recovery efforts following a traumatic event. The program received \$3.76 million in FY2020. In FY2019, \$8.2 million in grants were awarded. Appropriations not used in the year in which they are appropriated remain available for awards in subsequent fiscal years.
- **School Climate Transformation Grants (SCTGs):** SCTGs are competitive grants provided to SEAs and LEAs to develop and implement multi-tiered decisionmaking frameworks designed to improve school climate and behavioral outcomes for all students, such as PBIS systems. The first cohort of SCTGs was competitively awarded to 12 SEAs and over 70 LEAs in 21 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands for a five-year period beginning in FY2014. In FY2018, a second SCTG–SEA competition awarded new grants totaling approximately \$9 million to 14 SEAs. A second SCTG–LEA competition awarded grants of \$200,000 to \$750,000 per year for up to five years to 69 LEAs in 25 states, totaling nearly \$42.4 million in grants in its first year. Both the second cohort SCTG–LEA and SCTG–SEA competitions provided a competitive preference priority to programs with plans to support communities impacted by the opioid crisis by providing grants to SEAs and LEAs to implement school-based opioid-use prevention strategies.
- **Project Prevent Grants:** Project Prevent awards competitive grants to LEAs in communities with pervasive violence to support students and reduce the likelihood that students who have been exposed to violence will later commit violent acts themselves. Recipients of Project Prevent grants are required to provide (1) school-based social and emotional supports to victims of violence, (2) access to counseling services to assist students in coping with trauma or anxiety, and (3) strategies and activities to improve the school environment and prevent future violence. In 2019, ED awarded Project Prevent grants to 15 LEAs totaling approximately \$11.3 million.
- **Grants to States for Emergency Management (GSEM):** The GSEM grant program is intended to build the capacity of SEAs to support LEAs in the development and implementation of school emergency operations plans (EOPs) to address both natural and man-made threats. States use GSEMs to provide LEAs with training and technical assistance on developing and

implementing school EOPs. In FY2018, ED awarded 11 five-year GSEMs of up to \$750,000, totaling approximately \$6.3 million in grants.

- **Mental Health Service Professional Demonstration Grant Program:** In FY2019, ED provided Mental Health Service Professional Demonstration grants to 27 SEAs and LEAs totaling approximately \$11.15 million to support partnerships that will train school-based mental health service providers to serve in schools located in high-need LEAs.

Other ED Resources on School Safety

In addition to grant programs to support school safety, ED maintains resources that could be helpful to policymakers who want to understand more about this issue, or parents, teachers, and school administrators who want to explore ways to enhance the safety of their local schools and IHEs. ED operates centers that provide information and technical assistance on school safety and produces reports and data products on school safety and security, including the following:

The Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Technical Assistance (REMS TA) Center, which builds the “preparedness capacity” of schools, LEAs, IHEs, and their community partners and provides information, resources, and services in the field of K-12 and higher education emergency operations planning. The REMS TA Center received \$3.1 million in FY2020.

The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (NCSSLE), which offers information and technical assistance to states, LEAs, and schools that receive Title IV-A SSAE grants. NCSSLE also provides listings of grants received by each state, as well as by LEAs within each state, from ED and other federal agencies to support safe and supportive school-based initiatives. The NCSSLE received \$1.5 million in FY2020.

Indicators of School Crime and Safety, which is a report produced jointly by ED and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). This report presents federal data on school conditions, school crime, and school security measures, based on information drawn from a variety of data sources, including national surveys of students, teachers, and principals conducted by ED and DOJ.

Other CRS Resources on School Safety

- CRS Report R45251, *School Resource Officers: Issues for Congress*
- CRS In Focus IF10836, *Department of Justice Support for School Safety Initiatives*
- CRS In Focus IF10882, *Department of Homeland Security Resources for School Security and Safety*
- CRS In Focus IF10910, *Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) Grants*

Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.